

Open to Inner Peace 4 Walking Meditation



Principles and Benefits

Meditation is a process of developing greater awareness so that we can make changes to our consciousness, be more deeply fulfilled and have a greater understanding of life.

In walking meditation we try to keep our awareness involved with the experience of walking to make it our focus. This also implies that we are not withdrawing our attention from the outside world to the same extent as when our focus is more on breath control. Further, as we will be walking outside we will be aware of the wind, the sun, the sounds of nature and our external environment to a far greater extent than when we meditate inside.

One of the biggest differences is that many people find it easier to be more aware of their bodies whilst walking than when keeping still. It is thus an excellent way to develop our ability to take awareness into our ordinary lives. Once we have learned how to do walking meditation, each spell of walking – however short – can be used as a meditation practice.

The Practice

Start the Walking Meditation by not walking.

Stand still and check yourself out. Go through your whole body observing what it takes to stand still.

Make yourself comfortable with small movements or adjustments to your posture. Relax your mind. Use this time as a transition between whatever you have been doing or thinking about and entering a period of meditation that is just for you.

When you are ready, start to walk at a steady pace. We are not trying to change the way we walk, but simply be aware of it.



Physical sensations

As you walk focus your attention on your body, experience the sensations, not think about them:

- The contact your feet are making with the ground;

- Note how the muscles and joints of your legs feel. Focus on relaxing your muscles and getting your joints to work smoothly;

- Observe your breathing. This is where you get your strength from. You can also use it to control your heart beat and to make sure your muscles get the oxygen they need. Try to breath deeply and slowly;

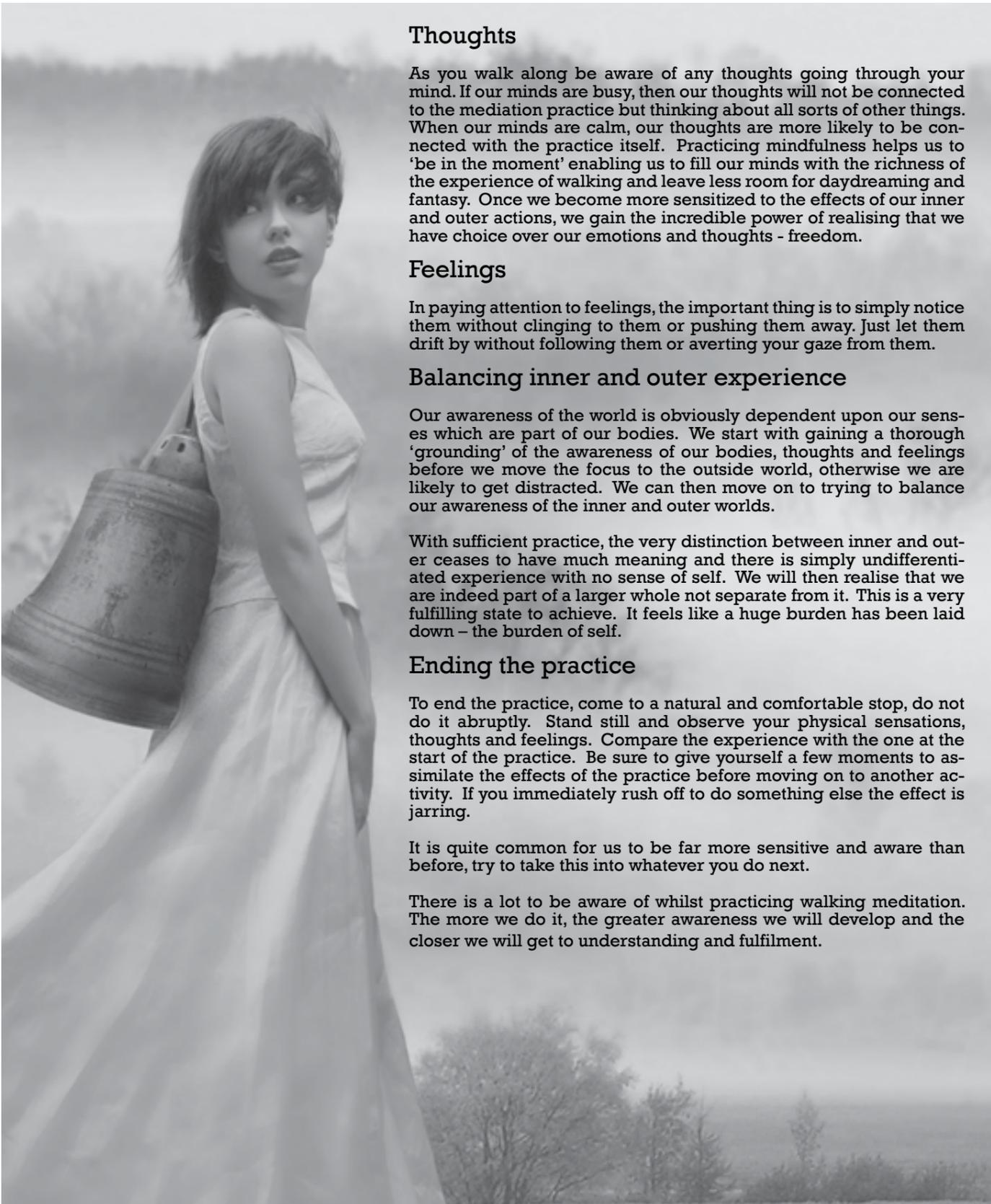
- Relax your shoulders and let your arms swing naturally with the rhythm of your walking;

- Become aware of your neck, and the muscles that support your head. Any tension can lead to head aches and tiredness, so relax. Notice the angle of your head. As you relax the muscles in the back of your neck, your chin will slightly tuck in and your skull becomes the point of balance. Experiment with the angle of your head. You may notice that as you tuck your chin closer to your chest, your experience becomes darker, more emotional and inward focused. If you lift your chin and hold it in the air you might notice that your experience becomes lighter and you are more aware of the outside world;

- Finally, relax you jaw and eyes – let them become softly focused, gently looking ahead, not staring at anything or letting yourself be caught up in what is happening around you, just passively observing it.

“the journey of a
thousand miles
begins beneath
one's feet”

Lao Tzu



Thoughts

As you walk along be aware of any thoughts going through your mind. If our minds are busy, then our thoughts will not be connected to the meditation practice but thinking about all sorts of other things. When our minds are calm, our thoughts are more likely to be connected with the practice itself. Practicing mindfulness helps us to 'be in the moment' enabling us to fill our minds with the richness of the experience of walking and leave less room for daydreaming and fantasy. Once we become more sensitized to the effects of our inner and outer actions, we gain the incredible power of realising that we have choice over our emotions and thoughts - freedom.

Feelings

In paying attention to feelings, the important thing is to simply notice them without clinging to them or pushing them away. Just let them drift by without following them or averting your gaze from them.

Balancing inner and outer experience

Our awareness of the world is obviously dependent upon our senses which are part of our bodies. We start with gaining a thorough 'grounding' of the awareness of our bodies, thoughts and feelings before we move the focus to the outside world, otherwise we are likely to get distracted. We can then move on to trying to balance our awareness of the inner and outer worlds.

With sufficient practice, the very distinction between inner and outer ceases to have much meaning and there is simply undifferentiated experience with no sense of self. We will then realise that we are indeed part of a larger whole not separate from it. This is a very fulfilling state to achieve. It feels like a huge burden has been laid down - the burden of self.

Ending the practice

To end the practice, come to a natural and comfortable stop, do not do it abruptly. Stand still and observe your physical sensations, thoughts and feelings. Compare the experience with the one at the start of the practice. Be sure to give yourself a few moments to assimilate the effects of the practice before moving on to another activity. If you immediately rush off to do something else the effect is jarring.

It is quite common for us to be far more sensitive and aware than before, try to take this into whatever you do next.

There is a lot to be aware of whilst practicing walking meditation. The more we do it, the greater awareness we will develop and the closer we will get to understanding and fulfilment.

Heather George is a Yoga Alliance registered Senior Yoga Teacher and Pilates teacher, specializing in Yoga for health including remedial. She provides classes for Spas, schools, private and corporate clients.

Tony Davis is a meditation teacher and long distance walker. He has a particular interest in the benefits of meditation and mindfulness in the workplace and combining meditation with walking. Together they run workshops & retreats. Go to www.omtropy.com or ring 01784 492500 for more details. Please see advert on page 45.

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